

The motto of the US National Guard is 'Always Ready, Always There'. Only four words, but living up to them is easier said than done. One of the Air National Guard units to which this applies is the 165th Airlift Wing located at Savannah International Airport, Georgia.

report: **Henk de Ridder**

WITH THE DEMAND for air mobility among the US military and its allies showing no sign of abating, the 'Savannah Guard Dawgs' routinely find themselves operating from different countries across the globe. The men and women of the 165th Airlift Wing (AW) are responsible for supporting, maintaining and flying eight C-130H Hercules airlifters in order that the unit can perform the missions it bids for, or is tasked with.

When Ray Charles was recording his famous version of 'Georgia On My Mind' in 1960, he might have been thinking of the

town of Savannah. The city is located along the Savannah River near the shores of the Atlantic Ocean, in the north-eastern corner of Georgia. During the hot southern summers, a sea breeze will cool the air somewhat. And while strolling through the beautiful, historic center, you realize that it is an attractive region in which to live. Being a Guard member and working together towards the Guard's motto — there are surely worse places to do that.

A 30-minute drive from downtown Savannah brings you to Savannah International Airport (IAP). Here, on the north-eastern part of the airfield, the 165th AW has fulfilled its air transport role for more than 50 years. The unit's last

fighters — F-86L Sabre interceptors — disappeared from the skies above Savannah in 1962 and the 165th Air Transport Group began to receive the C-97F Stratofreighter. After flying the Stratofreighter for five years the unit welcomed the C-124C Globemaster II in 1967. The first C-130 came to Savannah in 1975. Its long history in the role makes the 165th one of the most experienced air transport wings within the Air National Guard.

Role and mission

The 165th AW stands ready for tactical airlift missions and is commanded by Col Rainer 'Speedy' Gomez, a master navigator with 5,000 hours on types including the B-52G Stratofortress and C-130E/H. The wing's C-130s provide air transport for airborne forces, delivering their equipment and supplies by air-drop or air-land, and provide strategic airlift of personnel, equipment and supplies. As an ANG unit, the 165th has a humanitarian role. If called to duty by the state governor, the 165th will supply air transport during natural disasters such as floods,

With its four Allison T56-A-15 turboprops turning and burning, a 165th AW C-130H-3 is readied for a local sortie.
Henk de Ridder



earthquakes, and forest fires. The unit also plays a role in search and rescue operations. In peacetime, the unit is under federal control and is ready to respond to a call for any form of tactical airlift. Operations are not limited to the state of Georgia or the United States; missions are carried out all over the world.

Under the command of Lt Col Sheldon B. Wilson since June 14, 2015, the wing's flying unit — the 158th Airlift Squadron (AS) — includes around 100 pilots, flight engineers, navigators, and loadmasters. In 2014, the unit flew more than 2,000 hours and the wing received its 10th Air Force Outstanding Unit Award during a ceremony in September that year. The 165th AW has distinguished itself through numerous achievements. But perhaps the most outstanding one was its receipt of the Air Mobility Command Flying Hour Milestone Award for an unprecedented 165,000-plus accident-free hours, including 11,600 combat flying hours.

A typical 165th AW mission differs somewhat from those flown by active-duty units, as operations group

commander Col Hal Davis explained: 'We fly mostly two-ship tactical air-drop missions, for about two hours. Mostly we practice low-level air-drops for a few runs, some patrols and go back to base in less than two hours. Active-duty units make longer missions with more crews on board so they change crew during the mission. Landing on rough strips is another skill we often practice, and requires great skill from the pilots. The 165th also performs a lot of 'Guard Lift': when a unit is going on an exercise somewhere in the US, the equipment and maintenance gear is moved by us. We do a lot of trips, not only in the US, but also outside the country. We have been to the Middle East 12 times now.'

'Bidding' missions

Davis explained to *Combat Aircraft* that the unit can 'bid' for a certain number of missions: 'The demand for air transport within the US Air Force is enormous. Every quarter, an airlift conference is organized which offers hundreds of missions. Every airlift unit can bid on offered missions. Think of transport for a

SAVANNAH GUARD DAWGS

165TH AIRLIFT WING



fighter squadron to 'Red Flag' or the transportation of troops for a deployment. One of the finest missions the 165th could lay its hands on was to take part in the 70th commemoration of Operation 'Market Garden' in the Netherlands. Two airplanes went over to Eindhoven air base, together with two from the Kentucky ANG. When it was confirmed that this mission was assigned to the 165th AW, the personnel of Air Mobility Command's Tanker Airlift Control Center [AMC-TACC] started working on the mission. This included the making of the flight plan.

'Often the flight plan changes due to weather conditions. Different routes over the Atlantic Ocean are worked out. The C-130 can fly all alone over the ocean, unlike fighters, which fly in groups accompanied by a tanker for air refueling. The C-130H does not have air-refueling capability and has to 'hop' over. The four Allison T56-A-15 turboprop engines are

very reliable. Once in the Netherlands, crews practiced the tactical airlift missions and tactical air-drops. The memorial offered a good practice for air-drops in a different surrounding. During this deployment the crews learned how to handle the typical European weather circumstances. The day of the ceremony started with heavy fog and barely any visibility. When the sun started to do its work and the fog slowly disappeared, the C-130s finally got the chance to drop the paratroopers. The 'Market Garden' memorial turned out to be a very good opportunity for the 165th to practice a mass para-drop with other units under challenging weather conditions.'

Joining the Guard

Of the more than 1,150 people working for the 165th AW, approximately 40 per cent are in full-time service and 60 per cent are traditional Guardsmen who come in two days per month for 'drill



weekend' and then periodically throughout the year, according to mission requirements. Before entering a Guard unit, most of the personnel will have served in an active-duty unit. Nowadays, the active-duty US Air Force, Air Force Reserve Command and the Air National Guard are all part of the same team, the Total Force, but administratively they all remain different. If an active-duty member wants to join the ANG, he or she must first separate from active-duty and can then be hired into the Guard in their state of choice.

Once a member of the Guard, an airman can stay in that unit as long as they like, although depending upon the opportunities for advancement some will

Left: A C-130H crew typically consists of a pilot, co-pilot, flight engineer, navigator and, depending on the mission, one or two loadmasters.

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Above: Col Hal Davis of the 165th AW. USAF



transfer to other state Guard units, or complete assignments at the National Guard Bureau in Washington DC, in order to further their professional development. Working in the ANG is different from the active-duty Air Force in the sense that Guard members are not forced to move to another assignment every two to three years. They can stay in the same state's Guard unit for their whole career if they want to.


H-model 'Herc'

In 1975 the 165th AW received its first Hercules, in the form of the C-130E, at that time the 'standard' within the USAF and ANG. The C-130H came to Savannah in 1981. Over the years, changes have

been made to improve the performance of the H-model, and the 165th AW began to receive the C-130H3 in 2015. Compared to the H2, the H3 includes a partial 'glass' cockpit, laser gyros for the inertial navigation units, GPS receivers, AN/APN-241 radar, night vision capability, instrument lightning, and an integrated radar and missile warning system. The H3 also has an up-to-date generator control unit (GCU), which provides a more stable source of power.

Col Hal Davis continues: 'A C-130H performs missions with five to six crew members: a pilot, co-pilot, flight engineer, navigator and, depending on the mission, one or two loadmasters. For air-drops and when there are more than

40 people aboard a second loadmaster is required.'

As of December 2015 the 165th was operating four 'new' C-130H2.5/H3s, all of which are former Air Force Reserve Command and ANG aircraft from Colorado, Illinois, and West Virginia, and four C-130H2s dating from Fiscal Year 1980. Transition training of the pilots and crew to the H3 model takes about two to three days, and is undertaken by the squadron itself at Savannah. The older H2s will be sold to foreign nations or stored at the 'boneyard' at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, Arizona. Until then, the 165th Aircraft Maintenance Unit will continue to keep the remaining C-130H2 aircraft at the top of their game. 

Top: The unit's eight aircraft all wear a red tail stripe bearing the 'Savannah' legend.

Meanwhile, the emblem of the 'Savannah Guard Dawgs' can be found near the cockpit — the head of an Irish bulldog in front of two crossed bones. USAF/MSGT Charles Delano

Above: A Georgia ANG C-130H disgorges paratroops during training in Corsica with the French military. USAF/MSGT Charles Delano